

ADDRESS

TO THE

WORKING CLASSES,

ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF THEIR CONDITION
AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

BY JAMES MACARA, W.S.

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PREFACE.

THE following Address was delivered in November last, to a meeting of the working classes in Fifeshire, called for the purpose, and it met with their full approbation. The Author submitted it afterwards to the perusal of several friends, and has been advised that it ought to be printed, although others warned him, which indeed from previous experience he knew, that the printing and publishing of pamphlets is almost uniformly attended with loss. A more serious difficulty lies in the ill-will that such a publication may be the means of occasioning, and in the effect that the measure contemplated may have upon the Author's own interests; but the paramount view which he has endeavoured to cherish is the great good which the publication may be a means towards the accomplishment of.

Besides personal friends, the Author has submitted this Address to the perusal of some gentlemen of the highest standing for enlightened philanthropy and benevolence, and they have been pleased to express their approbation of the principles it advocates, and their conviction of the good that would result by their being carried into effect.

If any one chooses to reprint this little work, or insert in a magazine or miscellany, the Author begs to say that he is heartily welcome.

34 LONDON STREET, EDINBURGH,
14th December 1846.

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ADDRESS

TO THE

WORKING CLASSES.

MY FRIENDS,

Perhaps I should make some apology or explanation why I take it upon me now to address you. The case and advancement of the condition of the working classes has been long a favourite study and pursuit of mine. Fifteen years ago, when the Reform Bill was introduced into Parliament, I wrote and published, and widely circulated, a tract insisting that the £10 franchise excluded, generally, the working classes, and that the *minimum* for a right to vote should be the owning and occupying of property of the value of £5 *per annum*. I need not say that my suggestion was disregarded. Were, however, this measure gone into, it might, as an inducement particularly to young men to acquire a little in youth, be the means of raising them and their families above pauperism, and even become the foundation of a future comfortable standing; and from the number of voters of the working classes secured by it, there would soon be a sufficiently powerful element in the legislature for attending to the interests of the whole of that body. It is not to this subject, however, that I intend at present particularly to call your attention, but to your advancement in an altogether different way.

I need not advert to the fact of the very low condition which.

for many years past, the working classes generally have been in ; and if any of them have enjoyed, or do enjoy, a partial elevation, it is mostly temporary, and arising from casual events. The hand-loom weavers, and many other operatives in similar departments, for a good many years could only make 4s. or 5s. per week, although I hope that at present they are somewhat better. But take a class whose circumstances are less fluctuating, and who compose the majority of operatives or labourers in the country—the agricultural servants ; it is well known that their average pay in Scotland has been found to be about 9s. per week, not only as wages, but for the subsistence of themselves and their families. In a late inquiry as to the condition of the agricultural labourers in Dorsetshire, in England, it was found that they had only 7s. per week.

You are well aware, my friends, that great improvements have, of late, been made in all departments in the arts and sciences, and in manufactures, as well as in agriculture. Taken altogether, I suppose that at this day one man produces, of the necessary commodities of life, from twenty to forty times as much as he could have done sixty years ago ; the result of which, we might conclude, should be a somewhat corresponding rise in the circumstances of the mass of society. But while lands have in this country risen to perhaps three or four times their old rents, and great landlords, and also many more aristocratic branches connected with the manufactures and commerce of the country, are in the enjoyment of the most overflowing affluence, the circumstances of the great mass of the people are little if any thing improved—nay, rather perhaps have become more depressed. These are very singular facts, and it meets one in the face that there is surely something unequal—something requiring attention. What if it shall appear that Providence has all along had the remedy provided, and is urging our attention to it, but that we in a great measure turn a deaf ear. The remedy, I think, laid open for our acceptance is a rise in the price of labour, consequent on emigration.

The plan hitherto pursued for having wages raised, has generally been combinations and strikes of workmen. These, however, have mostly been found only to have led to loss and injury, and sometimes to criminal punishment for the violences attending them. The Social system has also been tried, but its rules having been in many instances opposed to, and led to

a counteraction of, the divinely wise laws of the Author of our nature, it has also failed, and come to nought.

But, my friends, you will be desirous now that I state my views as to the remedy of the grievance and inequality felt. My attention has, particularly of late, been directed to a quarter of the world in which, from all I have been able to search out and discover, the evils complained of do not exist; and I think that if we take a full and enlightened consideration of the subject, we will see that we have, from our connection with that country, and in present circumstances, the means of getting rid of all the evils and inequalities alluded to. The country or quarter of the globe I refer to is America, and, in particular, North America. I have many relations and correspondents in North America, and occasionally (besides correspondence) I am favoured with visits from some of them. From the information I have thus had the opportunity of acquiring, as well as from books of travels, &c. (although these latter are not always to be trusted to, being sometimes got up for selfish and party purposes,) I think I am able to give you a good deal of information on the subject, and I have also made it a matter, to myself, of very considerable attention and study.

Let it be recollected that I am at present addressing myself to mechanics and labouring people—to persons, many of whom may be earning 9s. or 10s. per week, although I am aware that some are in the precarious enjoyment for the time of higher wages. Well, if I should say to such persons, that by a few days' sailing they would be certain of getting employment, at nearly as much per day as they are now getting in a week, I think that, as rational people, they should hail the information with joy.

I had a visit in the summer of last year from a friend, who had been about twenty-five years out in North America, chiefly in New York, but who had travelled through other States, and my enquiries were particular and minute as to the condition of the working classes. He told me, and his information coincides with that of others, that the regular wages of a mechanic were two dollars a-day, and of a labourer a dollar and a half; *i. e.* of a mechanic 8s. 6d. per day, and of a labourer 6s. 4d.; and on a calculation of the relative expense of living there and in this country, we found that living was about one-third less in America than here. These wages continued regular

through the whole year, excepting for about two months in winter, when they fell short about one-third. Thus the regular wages of a mechanic may be stated at £125 *per annum*, and of a labourer £94, with the difference of the expense of living. Of course my friend stated, that mechanics and labourers live very well in America, keep good houses and tables, and so on.* He added, however, that new emigrants did not for a time get quite so good wages, and the reasons which had occurred to him, after his long observation, were, that from their inferior living in the old countries, they were for a time not so stout as the Americans—and also that from enjoying a higher sphere of political standing, the Americans were in better spirits. I should also further be inclined to think, that employers will not have complete confidence in emigrants newly arrived, with whom they are not acquainted, whilst the emigrants, on the other hand, will be anxious to engage immediately even at a sacrifice, so as to get on as soon as possible.

But it may be asked, how does it happen that the working classes get so good wages in America? The reason appears to me to be shortly this. The ownership of land is got there for a trifle—a few shillings per acre, and the having a farm of one's own, being better and more agreeable than continuing a labourer or mechanic, emigrants are inclined, and are soon able, to rise from their condition of servants to that of masters and lairds, or, if they choose to continue servants, it will only be by their continuing to receive at least nearly as much, in name of wages, as they might make by having farms of their own. A near relation of mine, now deceased, went out a good many years ago to reside in the British province of Nova Scotia, and after being there about six months, and having then little else to do than to make observations, he wrote to me a very particular account of the state of that province. Speaking of agriculturists, he gave the general description of that class thus—that coming out with a shilling in their pockets, they were, in the course of about six years, living comfortably and in abundance on farms of their own.

* The Americans, particularly of the United States, are noted for their attention to the comforts and elegancies of the female part of the community, and for their ample legal provision for the support of educational establishments for the young.

And is this to be wondered at, considering the wages they received while they were labourers and workmen ?

I have heard of bad reports from some emigrants to America. These, however, were, so far as I ever knew, from persons who were not adapted for emigration to that country. Suppose, for instance, and this is one of the cases, a young man, a farmer's son here, bred rather as a gentleman, not accustomed to work : he gets two or three hundred pounds, goes out, obtains a farm, lives as a gentleman, and has his foreman and servants. He, indeed, soon goes through his money, and returns full of maledictions against the country. Some again, perhaps more nearly approaching to the proper class, who are ill behaved here, their friends are glad to get quit of by sending away any where. These are persons that are not likely to get on well in any country. But further, as I have stated, even with mechanics and labourers the encouragement is not so good at first. Well, their first letters home may not be so favourable ; and after they have been out a year or two, they form new connections and in a great degree forget their old friends. But I state with the utmost confidence that mechanics, tradesmen, and labourers, willing to do well, may, in America, either by continuing to work to others, or by getting farms of their own, or becoming masters in their own departments, be advanced to a standing and circumstances incomparably superior to any thing that they can have now in prospect in this country—nay, that they will be in circumstances in which they may be in the full enjoyment of all those blessings so abundantly shed down upon us by Providence, by the late great discoveries and advances in the manufactures, arts, and sciences.

Let us now advert to what, by an extensive emigration, may be the effect in Britain and other old countries in Europe. Why, if people get into the habit and fashion of going out to America, the distance is not so great but that the working classes remaining here might be on much the same footing as there. If they do not here get about two dollars or a dollar and a half per day, they can step into a vessel at Glasgow, or other port, and at the expense of about £3 get over in a few days to America, where they will obtain such wages ; and thus if their services are to be secured here, it will have to be by paying them at something like the rates got in America.—There may be some who will object, that the measure pointed out goes to a total revolutionising of the state of things in this

country—great part of the consumers of our agricultural produce off—and people getting land in America without having to pay rent—the land here will not let, or at least very ill; and thus our landholders will be quite reduced, and our manufacturers will be impeded, from the high price wages may come to. So, to keep up our aristocracy in their overgrown wealth, they would reduce and starve the mass of the people. Thanks to Divine Providence, there seem to be most appropriate means of escape from such an oppression. There is no danger, however, but that the aristocracy will always have a sufficiency. Consider, too, that there is in Britain an annual increase of nearly half a million, whilst the land does not give produce sufficient for the present inhabitants; and if emigration does not proceed, and that extensively, we are likely to come into a bad state. There is at present, from railroads and some other great public works, employment for a great many thousands of mechanics and labourers, who would likely otherwise be idle; but it cannot be calculated that such employment will last long; and if there is no other mode of their disposing of themselves, it is dismal to anticipate the awful condition that many may be thrown into.

But should, by the proposed extensive emigration, the aristocracy be considerably brought down, I believe that it would be for their own essential good. The principles of dominating over our neighbours, and of amassing great estates and fortunes, have been, coeval with, and since the fall of the human race, the great evils of the world, and the roots of all other evils, and they are in the Bible fully denounced. But have we any standard and example in relation to these points, on which to form our lives? Yes, when all precepts and denunciations from Heaven failed, the Lord of Heaven, "God manifested in the flesh" (1) himself assumed human nature to be, among other purposes, our pattern and example. Did he come into the world in the station of a King or Emperor? Let the Gospels answer. "Is not this the Carpenter's son?" (2) and in another place, "Is not this the Carpenter, the son of Mary." (3) Did he associate with the worldly great? His friends Lazarus, and Martha and Mary, whom it appears he visited often, do not seem even to have had a house servant. It is said that "Martha was cumbered about much serving." (4) To his

(1) 1 Tim. iii. 16. (2) Matt. xiii. 55. (3) Mark. vi. 3. (4) Luke x. 40.

disciples he said, I called you not servants but friends.⁽⁵⁾ He tells us that he came not to be served, but to serve,⁽⁶⁾ and such was his whole life on earth; and he rebukes his disciples for any of them aiming at a superiority over the others.⁽⁷⁾ He instructs us to learn of him, for he was meek and lowly in heart,⁽⁸⁾ and to follow him and his example.⁽⁹⁾ On one occasion he visited a rich man, Zaccheus. Well, all that we learn of Zaccheus on the occasion, and as the effect of the teaching and example of the Lord, was this—"Behold, Lord," said Zaccheus, "the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold."⁽¹⁰⁾ May the rich now receive and act on such a principle.

To return to the subject more immediately under consideration. Some may doubt of the propriety of a great many going out to America immediately, and without previous arrangements. The best time for going out is in March, at least so as to be in America by April, the commencement of the spring season; and there, I believe, never occurred a more proper time than the ensuing spring.* From the defect of crops this year, and scarcity in this and some other European countries, the Americans have got their great stores of grain and other provisions disposed of, and their coffers full. They will be ready with the greatest vigour to carry on and extend their agricultural and other pursuits, and it is plain that there will be thus a great demand for working people, and that wages will of course be high. Much also will be done in the extension of agriculture from the repeal, almost total, of the corn laws in Britain, and our ports being thus open for the reception of their produce.

I may here notice, that some months ago I read in Tait's Magazine the review of a book of travels in the United States, by a Scotsman, a journeyman mechanic, or tradesman; and he particularly mentions having sometimes fallen in with a weaver settled upon a farm—that the farmers are excessively fond of having one settled on their properties, and give them great encouragement, and, indeed, to secure their settlement and services, they must do so.

(5) John. xv. 15. 16. (6) Matt. xx. 28. (7) Matt. xx. 26. (8) Matt. xi. 29.
(9) John. xiii. 15. Phil. iii. 5. John. ii. 6. (10) Luke x. 8.

* If a whole family cannot emigrate from want of funds, one or more could in the meantime go out, and he could soon send money enough to provide for the wants of the others and bring them all out.

I have directed my remarks a good deal to emigration to the United States of America, but I believe that much of the British provinces is equally eligible. I have a near relation settled, with his family, in Upper Canada, on a farm, and they are doing very well. The British provinces enjoy considerable advantages, particularly as to the terms of their trade and intercourse with the mother country and our West Indian islands, where they send a great deal of wood, fish, &c., as well as to home; and, in particular, they are able to collect and export a great deal of that valuable article, pearl-ashes, which are produced there in large quantities, on burning down wood and lumber.

And now, finally, we must be all aware that such a measure as I have been treating of will (as before hinted) meet with a most dire opposition from many quarters, and, indeed, it must be evident that there are too many interests, selfish interests, at stake, not to call such opposition forth. Lies and misrepresentations will be abundantly invented and circulated, and also every persuasion attempted, to operate on the feelings. Horrors attending a very simple and easy matter will be conjured up, enough almost to stagger a man of the firmest nerve. I lately witnessed something of this, and in a quarter too where it might not have been expected. Several years ago, when a great general manifestation was made in Scotland for the repeal of the corn laws, a meeting was convened from almost all districts of the country—chiefly of clergymen—held for several days in a large church in Edinburgh. Well, one evening I attended for some time, when, in particular, one of the speakers, who seemed to be a clergyman, expatiated on the awful horror of any of the people being obliged to emigrate to America: he held this as far beyond the sufferings by the corn laws,—possibly he was more horrified at the idea of any of his people going out, and thus diminishing his congregation. Certainly, however, the way he spoke of the horrid thing of being obliged to go out to the wilds of America, was very appalling, and I might possibly have gone over to the feeling expressed, but for an incident that happened just before coming into the meeting. I was getting a little job done by a tinsmith in the neighbourhood, and called to see if it was ready. It was not, and the shopkeeper, a Mrs Torrance, apologised to me, that they were at a loss, two of their men having lately left them for New York. One of them, she said, was her son, and the other a journeyman lad. I asked her what encouragement they were getting at New York. She said that they were journeymen there, and that her son got

12s. per day, but he was a good hand, and the other got 8s. per day. I really, on adverting to this, could not enter into the feeling of horror expressed in the meeting about going to America.

* * I am informed that at Glasgow, Liverpool, Cork, and other ports for America, there are agents for procuring and giving to Emigrants information as to the places in that country where working people in the different departments can obtain employment : but this seems to be of little importance, as there can be no doubt that at present, and while America continues in so prosperous a state as it is now in, employment will be readily got at almost every place emigrants may go to.

